

From China to Europe via Siberia

ON the eighth day of April last spring we boarded the S. S. "Sakoke Maru," which was to take us from Shanghai to Dairen.

The days previous to the above date were full of anxiety and work. Only little more than a week had passed since we left our station in Honan, where the work was going on much as usual. The men at the Bible School were just as eager to finish the year's work as ourselves were. But when the final order came from the consul general, we had no choice about it; we had to close school and leave. All the pupils at the school faithfully stood by us to the very last. Have many happy recollections from those last days in Sinyang! Many of the Christians wept sore when the last company of missionaries left the city. They would fain have seen us remain with them. Even the people on the street seemed just as friendly as ever.

After having been on the road for several days we managed to reach Hankow, but only to learn that my family, in company with the other missionaries, had been obliged to leave Hankow and proceed to Shanghai. Arriving in Shanghai in due course of time, I finally located my folks packed away in a dark attic room of the navy Y. M. C. A. building.

Preparations for leaving Shanghai were undertaken immediately. But everything seemed to work against us. On account of the war situation obtaining at Shanghai, it was very difficult to transact any business in that city. Our friends advised against our going across Siberia. The raid on the Russian embassy in Peking brought a guard of foreign soldiers to the doors of all the official Russian buildings in Shanghai. Both upon our entrance of these buildings and upon our departure from them, we were searched by the soldiers on the guard. However, we managed to secure our passport, our tickets, and also some Russian money for the journey. Calling on the consulate to get advice, the vice-consul shook his shoulders and said, "I don't know," but then he added, "If I were in your position I would go."

In the evening of the 8th of April we went aboard the above mentioned vessel. The next morning when we awoke we were leaving Shanghai and making our way out into the Yellow Sea. The sudden change from extreme turbulence to extreme peace and quietude almost overwhelmed us the first day of the journey. Could it be possible that China, which we now could barely see from the ship on the quiet waters, should be in such an uproar? Yes, but the sea, which is quiet one day, may be in uproar the next day and vice versa. China may come in for her quiet day too!

On our way to Dairen we made a short stay at Tsing-tao. As soon as we reached the shore we could notice that we once more had reached the territory belonging to the north. We spoke to the soldiers on the shore. They were not slow in responding in their Honan dialect. Some of the former glory of the city, when the Germans were in charge of it, could still be seen. But now, everything, the streets, the houses, etc., bore unmistakable signs of deterioration. We had in mind to get in touch with the missionaries in the city, but our stay in port was too brief to go in search for them.

Everything about Dairen bears testimony to growth, order and neatness. The city of Dairen be-

longs to the Japanese and is governed by them. Even the large Chinese section of the city seems prosperous and flourishing. Thousands of Chinese were these days flocking into this section to escape the unendurable conditions in China proper. No less a person than Duan Chi-sui, the former acting president of China, had lately arrived and taken up his abode in the city.

In the Chinese section of the city the Danish Missionary Society has an old and well established work. This society has mission work in many sections of Manchuria. We feel very grateful to the Danish missionaries both at Dairen and other stations for kindness and help extended to us in different ways.

While we were staying at Dairen, the papers in that city reported the rupture between North China and Russia. It was predicted that Russian soldiers would immediately be sent from Russia to China, and that the railway line would be busy with the transportation of these soldiers.

Somewhat heavy at heart we left Dairen for Harbin. The Japanese South Manchuria Railway operates trains from Dairen as far as Chang-chun. Passing thru Manchuria on this train we could hardly realize that we were still in China. The train was clean and comfortable, perfect quiet obtained at all stations along the road. No soldiers, no rowdies were in evidence anywhere. What a change from the trains in Honan!

Late in the evening we changed trains for Harbin. Crowds of Russians were seen at this station, who seemed to speak and act in a very excited manner. Bad rumors were heard about this city, so we were greatly relieved when we got on our train about midnight. This train belonged to the Chinese Eastern Railway Company, a company which is operated by Russia in China. This train was also very clean and comfortable.

The next morning, when we got to Harbin we were eager to get news about our trains—Siberian trains. While still in Dairen we read in the newspapers that some of the Russians from the raided embassy in Peking were to return home. From this item of news we inferred that at least one more train was to get across. Upon our arrival we were informed by the authorities in charge of the trains—Siberian railway—that the trains would leave at the scheduled time.

While in Harbin we found time to make several calls on the Danish missionaries in that city. Thursday of Holy Week we partook of communion together with them. On Good Friday we were invited to spend most of that day with one of their families and join them in a little service. What a fine rest and good preparation for the long journey ahead of us!

While in Harbin we also had the happy surprise to meet an old Chinese acquaintance, the Rev. Ding Ti-mei. Rev. Ding, who has been one of the leading Chinese pastors in China, had accepted a call from the Chinese congregation at the Danish mission station in Harbin, and at the present time served that congregation in the capacity of a pastor. It gave me much joy to learn some facts about the local congregation in Harbin. It has built a church auditorium having a seating capacity of 1000 people. It has called its own pastor, paying him a monthly salary of \$150.00. The congregation is managing its own affairs in every way. I think this congregation in Harbin is in many

ways a unique illustration of the power of the Gospel.

On the stated time we left Harbin to go to the border stations, between China and Siberia. On Easter Sunday we arrived at Manchouli, at which place we were to get on the trans-Siberian train. While we were waiting for our train some of us went over to attend a service in a Russian church. It gladdened my heart to see the large congregation attending the service. The priest seemed to speak to them very earnestly, using the names of Kristus, Petrus, Paulus, very frequently. While we did not understand anything but the names above, we went away from the service with the happy assurance that the priest really told the people about the resurrection of Christ.

When the customs formalities were over we were allowed to board the train which was to take us across Siberia and Russia. As we got into this train our hearts beat first a little faster than they ordinarily do. Were we really to get off after all? After having started, would our train be claimed by the Russian soldiers who were said to be on their way to China? While we were musing upon such and similar questions, the train's whistle blew and off we started.

Our compartment really appeared quite inviting. We found a large doorway in the middle of it, with two berths on each side of the doorway,—and one small table on each side of it. The floors were carpeted and everything looked fresh and clean. We only wished that our beds had been made so we could lie down, because we were terribly tired.

However, we had not gone very far before the train came to a sudden stop. A large retinue of officers boarded the train, and once more were all the passengers subjected to all kinds of search. A woman came into our compartment to examine our baggage. It was interesting to watch her. Her interest and attention to the details grew less for each piece of baggage she examined; the last and largest piece she only moved her hand at as she departed from the room. As a result of the frequent examination of the passports, it became a common diversion among a number of the passengers to go and knock at each other's doors and call for the passports! When this search, which lasted for hours, had been completed, the train started to move—and now we were really going! The bedding was brought in, the beds made ready—and we settled down for the long journey.

About 17 years ago we came to China by way of Siberia on a line at that time operated by the International Railway Company. At this time we traveled by the same line, but the line is now under the control of the Soviet government of Russia. It soon became apparent that the conveniences on the present trains did not come up to those in former times. The wash-room outfit was meager, no soap, no towels, and a very limited supply of water. The rooms were also "made up" in a shiftless manner—no attempt was made on the part of the porters to make the passengers comfortable. Twice our bedding was taken away and brought back only upon the payment of a sum of money. Otherwise the passengers were not subjected to any hardships of any kind. Most of us, I think, managed to keep quite happy during the whole journey.

Our food was brought at the stations along the road. The securing of food was the most interesting part of the journey. Consulting our English-Russian lexicon for words and phrases and making use of them

in purchasing our necessities occupied much of our time. In this way we managed to secure bread, butter, milk, eggs, soup, meat, potatoes, etc. With boiled water always at hand free of charge, and some tins of "thermo-heat," we could make very delicious meals. As time went on we became quite proficient in handling our new knowledge of Russian, so much so that purchasing became a pleasure.

A journey across Siberia is in many ways very monotonous. From our train can be seen vast stretches, at some places barren, at other places abounding in trees and shrubs. Very few houses, but large herds of cattle are in evidence everywhere. The mountainous region around Lake Baikal is very beautiful. The soil in Russia proper seems to be very fertile. On the way we pass thru a large number of big cities, all adorned by a multitude of golden church spires.

The living conditions in Russia seem to be very poor. An atmosphere of dirt, filth, and disorder is visible on all sides. A smooth shaven man or a well-dressed person can hardly be seen anywhere. The homes in which the people live do not look inviting. Most of their houses are surrounded by lakes of mud.

On the Russian Easter Sunday, one week later than ours, just eight days after we started, we arrived in Moscow. Have never seen so many drunk people in one day as we saw in Moscow that Sunday. A large number of maimed, palsied, crippled people were also in evidence on every turn. Beggars were so insistent that one had practically to fight one's way thru. In Leningrad conditions did not seem very much better. There were ruined houses, some burned down, some without doors and windows; several large houses had been changed into horse stables. Everything looked desolate and dilapidated. My total impression of Russia may be summed up in the well-known words: "Physician, heal thyself." Russia needs healing before she can undertake to heal up the ills of other countries.

"Finlanska Vaksal." From this railway station we got our train to Finland. How happy we were when the porter on that train spoke to us in the Swedish language. Our joys were only to increase as we went on. In Finland, at Helsingfors, we had a very pleasant visit at the mission home belonging to the Finnish Mission Society. In Stockholm, where we remained for two days, we stopped at Hotel "Canaan." In Oslo we were met at the railroad station by a host of friends. Our five days' stay in the Norwegian capital was exceptionally pleasant. Arriving in Bergen, we realized that we were nearing the goal of our journey. Letters of "welcome home" were found at the hotel. Several days later we reached the home of our childhood, which had been prepared for our occupancy, and in which we are now living.

—HANS M. NESSE.

Gravitation works in spite of frail bridges.

Real life seeks expression.

The thing we long for, that we are.

Finding implies searching.

Excuses are refusals.

Precept may lead, but example draws.